It’s Party Time!

William H. Banzhaf

So here we are, entering our centennial year. SAF is 100 years old, and we’re the lucky foresters who get to celebrate!

I’ve reviewed some of the many wonderful activities state societies, divisions, chapters, and working groups have planned for the coming year, and I am truly impressed by the creativity and talents of the membership. There are projects that involve outreach to schoolchildren and civic groups; archiving activities to ensure that our successors will have the resources and information to celebrate our next anniversary; and, of course, the publication of a number of national, local, and individual histories and memoirs.

All of these efforts reflect our ability to focus on our centennial goal and work diligently until our work is completed. As a profession, we have always worked hard at what we do and have taken our responsibilities very seriously. It is clear we are applying the same work ethic to the centennial and that’s great—sort of.

As I’ve traveled the country and talked with members I’ve encountered a certain flatness about this wonderful birthday of ours. I’ve wondered, where is the joy, the lightness of heart, the just plain fun?

I get the feeling that many see the year as merely a more focused attempt to get the public to appreciate forestry and foresters. I understand, because I sometimes feel the same way. The last 10 to 15 years have not been easy for any of us, and it is difficult to shift from a mode of frustration to one of festivity. Nevertheless, I encourage us all to try. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to celebrate and take pride in what we have done and will do in the future. In other words, it’s party time!

Don’t tell me we don’t know how—I have been to enough state society banquets to know differently. I hope to see plans for special parties all across the country this year. If anyone wants ideas, I would be happy to share my experience at the joint SWSAF/AMPF (Mexican professional foresters) banquet: It started at 9:30 PM and closed with toasts and dancing at 3:00 AM. Another great party is planned for the national convention in November, but we sure don’t have to wait that long.

Letters

Certified Foresters and Forests

Thanks, Fred Ebel, for a succinct and optimistic view of our professional future in the November Commentary. With the ballooning issues of environmental protection and scientific accountability, I find it soothing to step back and count the simple but profound improvements our profession has ensured for my generation.

He also touches on the emerging debate over forester certification versus forest certification. How can we bridge the differences by taking the best from both? If our individual efforts as foresters result in positive environmental and social outcomes, we have done our job. Management of land tracts by certified foresters should accomplish this.

Unfortunately, the lost revenue in retaining filter strips, the down days waiting for the soil to dry to avoid compaction, and inappropriate mechanization sometimes give poor forestry practice the economic blue ribbon. Although the conscientious forester on the ground is familiar with these details, I am not sure that a blanket certification of a land tract can address them, not to mention the administrative difficulties in forest certification for the increasing number of small forest parcels.

David Banta
Pine City, Minnesota

Inventory Imperative

Congressman Bob Goodlatte and
Virginia State Forester James Garner are to be commended for their essay in the December issue's Perspective ("The New and Improved FIA Program") and for their exhortation to Forest Service Chief Dombeck to do what is needed for a national inventory and analysis of forested lands. As far back as 1974, Congress directed the Forest Service to do an "assessment" of the conditions of the nation's forests in the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act. The only return on that effort was some irregular and unscientific data from the National Forests that could not be aggregated on even a regional basis.

If government, industry, and the private landowners are ever going to deal with urban sprawl, natural resource price and availability, and forest sustainability, there is an urgent need for better data—at least on a regional basis. The state foresters have done an excellent job of leading the way. Now it is up to the Forest Service to do the job it has been neglecting since 1974.

James W. Giltmier
Springfield, Virginia

Sustainability and Democracy

I read with interest Robert Nelson's "The Religion of Forestry" (November) and his effort to make us stop to think, examine the past, and perhaps "move back to the frontiers of American political and economic thought." The response of Jack Ward Thomas and James Burchfield ("Comments on 'The Religion of Forestry: Scientific Management,'" November) views Nelson's essay from the perspective of actors who were in the battle and not only theorizing from outside the forum.

At the beginning of this century there were vast clearcut areas that didn't produce enough income to pay the property taxes. The climate was ripe for politicians, Pinchot among them, to claim that public management was a better alternative. The Forest Service was a natural outcome of those times.

As the century has rolled on, demands on forests have changed and grown: to comply with these demands, false science is sometimes used in some government institutions. I agree with Nelson that "foresters need to do more than establish the correct rate of growth." Under certain assumptions, he adds; these lead to "intensive management practices" and "allowable cut effects" to show, at least on paper, that the forest can produce more than nature's providence. Bad science, not scientific management, led to many of the problems and controversies of today.

Thomas and Burchfield point out that the push to ecosystem management was to adapt to changes in our democratic system and evaluate interactions of more variables in management. The greatest good was being redefined by the government of the people, and the Forest Service responded. Because of this, both the Forest Service and, more importantly, our democratic way of resolving conflicts will survive. Practicing sustainable land management consistent with ecologically sound principles is where forestry is on the advent of the 21st century.

Cornelio P. Groothousen
Siguatepeque, Honduras

Budgets, Not Religions

In reading Robert Nelson's article ("The Religion of Forestry: Scientific Management," November) it is obvious he has had very little or nothing to do with on-the-ground Forest Service management planning and budgeting in at least the last 30 years.

I went to work for the Forest Service in 1972 as an experienced professional forester, so I cannot speak as to Gifford Pinchot's qualifications or intentions. When I started there, many very competent foresters were developing timber management plans dealing with rate of harvest, type of cut, reforestation, erosion control, stream protection, recreation opportunities, and the many other factors in a land management plan, now referred to as ecosystem management. Not too many plans made it past the congressional budgeting process unchanged.

If Nelson is really interested in who set the management practices, at least from 1972 to 1990, I suggest he research the budgets for those years. I don't recall a year that the timber harvest budget wasn't at least what the Forest Service requested, and it was usually more than requested (with appropriate increases in harvest volume), while practically every other item was trimmed.

In every place I have ever worked, the planning and direction was controlled by those who held the purse strings—in this case Congress—and I never noted that "scientific management" or any other religion entered into the allocation process.

Don Campbell
Estatada, Oregon

Employing Ethics

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Timothy E. Johnson
Estonia, Oregon

CORRECTION

A letter to the editor published in January ("Ecosystem Bluff") was incorrectly attributed. The author was Harry V. Whitaker.